

THE QUIET HOUR.

SHOULD
WOMEN ENCOURAGE
THE BARGAIN COUNTER?

DISCUSSED BY

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"Madness Seizes the
Women Before the
Bargain Croughs."

By Mary Gay Humphreys.

IN ONE of the Rougemont series, "An Hour with the Bargain Counter," Zola has described the rise of such great "magnates" as "An Hour with the Bargain Counter," the forerunners of our department stores. One chapter is devoted to a study of the bargain counter, or of "occasions," as they are termed in France.

It was not the commercial aspect of the bargain counter that interested the novelist, but its influence upon the minds, morals and manners of the women who throng the shops. It was easy enough to demonstrate its truthfulness by going to the grand staircase of "An Hour with the Bargain Counter," which overlooks the bargain troughs in which the "occasions" of the day were placed, and witnessing one of its characteristic scenes.

Women urged several rows, deep around each trough. These narrow shelves of the approach with shoulders and elbows. The second row, peeping over their shoulders, endeavored to reach the coveted things being outstretched arms. The outer rows, who were nothing, thrust their hands through between the shelves below, hands without arms, pawing the others until the trough was agitated like a Liverpool, and ribbon ends, laces and gloves tossed in the air like flying foam.

It was as if a madness had seized these well-dressed women, respectable matrons, young wives, women of high and low degree. Their eyes shone with a fierce, wild light. They thrust and pushed and pawed without mercy. A few determined, collected souls bought the contents, but the great number, after the excitement of the bargain counter, stood with excellent self-way.

Some of these women and now as being possessed for the time of themselves. It seemed as if, for a Charcot, a Lombroso or a Freud, a new honor our sex every point of view.

It is possible to observe the varying bargain counter on two country women, are speaking of Paris, may be known as Miss X. and Miss Y. Young women were doing their final calling for home. It is needless to insist on this theme or its relation to the bargain counter.

One day Miss X. went to the shops and returned pale and exhausted, but without a purchase. The time of calling grew near and she confessed to her friends that she had been following the crowds from bargain trough, but it took away all her energy and no sooner determined to buy this than, immediately something else preyed on her mind. She wanted all, but she had, so great was her indecision.

An imposing name for this inability to act for this paralysis of the will.

She, contrary, bought everything she saw. Indeed, she was a travelling student of income. While her soul revolved and great joy in the purchase of costly velvets, she was vaguely conscious not pay for them. This indistinguishable and restrained her. The ecstasy of her, she was having a wild, free lance that counted no cost. She came home in a daze. As package was delivered and factor after factor for payment she emerged from her trance into tears. A male relative here condescended to look it upon himself to receive accumulating purchases and explain the mis-

fortune to the bargain counter, however, is rarely young. Youth is unreflecting, ignorant of the value of money, heedless of cost. The bargain hunter is the mother of clamoring sons and daughters, the housewife pressed by the narrow straits of home, the vain woman with a slender purse. Economy, however, is not that passion with American women that it is with French women.

The bargain counter finds itself rooted in human nature. "The love of getting things cheap," Mrs. Stone once wrote, "is the frailty of noble minds." Thus paraphrasing Milton in referring to the fascinations of second-hand shops.

The American woman is overcome by her sense of it. It is easy to persuade her that she owes it to her husband to seize the bargain while it lasts. Women with all-vices and all women with in hand are liable to these attacks. A fashion-hunt, whose name is known throughout the United States, she never buys a pair of gloves she sees announced a "sale" in the Sunday paper.

All her shopping is conducted in this manner. At there are two sides to the bargain counter, we know. It used to be said of A. T. Stewart that on a day of his doubtful every morning if he had any fine of goods not selling he ordered it to be reduced in price and conspicuously posted. He it not good policy to carry unsalable goods the public might be tempted by a lower price.

As going into the ethics of the bargain counter, as discussed elsewhere, it may be added that the numbers of women, especially those who

"Bargain Counters Are the Cause of Untold Horrors."

By Leonora O'Reilly,
Leader Among Organized Working Girls.

THIS question of the ethics of the "bargain counter," which is creating such a stir just now, might be answered from a working woman's point of view without much delay. Ethics stand for conditions not as they are, but as they ought to be. The bargain counter stands for conditions as they are, but as they ought not to be. Therefore, how can there be ethics of the bargain counter?

These are pretty positive statements, and to those of you who are not constantly facing the facts which he behind the bargain counter, they may need some explanation.

It is seldom that the truth concerning these facts comes to light. When it does, people cry sensationalism and sentimentality, and quiet their better feelings by saying, "These things are too horrible to be true; they are only the mouthings of an orator, who is ignorant on these questions." But I tell you the preacher has not yet spoken who has pictured half the tragedy of the lives of many of our brave women workers. Follow me for a moment and see if you do not agree with me.

The articles always to be found at the "bargain counter" are women's wraps, house skirts, morning gowns, silk waists, underwear, children's dresses, men's shirts and shirts, and children's and women's waists and cloaks. Wrappers which sell from 40 to 50 cents apiece are made for 40 cents a dozen, a little more than 4 cents apiece. Try to imagine the women who work at these garments as being able to live a clean, healthful and prosperous life on 98 cents a day.

Silk waists are made in some of our mercantile establishments for 48 cents a dozen, a little over 8 cents apiece. And these things are in such demand that they are taken from the worker's hands while they are still warm with her touch and handed over to the purchaser, so anxious is the public for bargains, which net the producer \$3.50 a week, if she does not lose a minute's time from Monday morning until Saturday night.

And we have women's house skirts and undershirts, made for 50 cents a dozen—a woman who is very smart can make six dozen of these in a week, which means \$3 a pay board, but clothes and get anything else out of life which she may desire.

Women's underwear, but the horrors of that trade is an old, old story. You have all heard of the women who stitch miles and miles of rucks in a day, and sew on blacks and blacks of needlework and ruffles. All for the miserable pittance of \$4 or \$4.50 a week.

Children's dresses, those dainty little things which fairly well-to-do mothers buy for their little ones, acknowledging that "they buy them ready made, because they could not think of making them and having them anything like as cheap."

I wonder why it never enters their heads to find out how they are made so cheap.

This is "how." Some other poor mother sits up half the night and sews on them—yes, often sews them beside the bed of her sick child. And this is the price the well-to-do "bargain counter" mother often pays. Seeds of sickness often fall quietly in between the little rucks and plaits and lie in wait for a victim.

Men's bargain shirts—behind these sit the women who work at home in tenement and in flat, and sew all day long, from 8 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night, and often all day Sunday. Many of these women never leave the spot in which they work for those twelve hours, having their food placed beside them on the table at which they sew.

I know of one family of women who work like this. If they have plenty of work, and work twelve and a half hours a day, they may make \$1.50 per day, or 12 cents an hour.

Around-holiday time their prices are reduced 25 per cent, because there is plenty of work to be had. So you see these women, who are generally regarded as being well paid, are forced to contribute \$2.25 per week, out of a salary of

are members of the Consumers' League, who practise certain discriminations in this matter. There is a growing appreciation among women that while economy is a beautiful thing, it may be carried too far; that consideration for others does not end at one's own door, one's church, one's social circle; that, far distant as they may be, there is still some relation between the woman whose duty it is to spend economically and comfortably for her family and the girl in the factory, at the loom, at the sewing machine.

As women have come to study economic subjects they realize that below a certain weekly wage no woman or girl can live without injury to either her health or her morals. In either case cheap goods such as women through bargain counters for are a crime. All reductions in ready-made goods, underclothing, for example, are for the benefit of the purchaser. To that extent they are able to buy it below a living wage they are responsible, even though ignorantly, for the harm it works. It is with this knowledge, as was intimated, that numbers of women refuse to take advantage of conspicuously low prices, and in matters of this sort deal with shops whose goods do not fall below a certain price.

These are questions that each individual must settle for herself either as her conscience or her intelligence prompts. The discussion of the bargain counter is in itself significant of that larger interest which is bringing us all closer together, and is bedding the place and the beneficent season.

Trying to Encourage Marriage.

The newspapers of Santa, Argentine Republic, give the text of a curious bill recently submitted to the Provincial Legislature. The purpose of the bill is to tax bachelorhood and splinterhood, and thus encourage marriage. The means are enumerated thus in the bill:

Article I. From and after the 1st of January, 1897, all single men above twenty and less than eighty years of age shall pay a monthly tax until they change their condition.

Article II. Age shall be based on the last census.

Article III. The tax shall be graduated as follows: For men of twenty to thirty years, \$5; for men of thirty to thirty-five, \$10; for men of thirty-five to forty, \$20; for men of forty to forty-five, \$30; for men of forty-five to fifty, \$40; for men of fifty to fifty-five, \$50; for men of fifty-five to sixty, \$60; for men of sixty to sixty-five, \$70; for men of sixty-five to seventy, \$80; for men of seventy to eighty, \$90.

Article IV. The following shall be exempt: 1. Widowers during a term of three years, within which period they should contract second marriages. 2. Widows above thirty years of age. 3. Widows, however, who were married young and are childless, or who have only one child, shall be liable to the tax even at that age.

Article V. Single women and single men who reject, without legitimate cause, applicants for their hands and do not marry shall be liable to a fine of \$500 in favor of the rejected suitor.

Article VI. The proceeds of the tax shall be distributed annually among fathers who can show they have at least twelve children living, in order that one may be educated in the name of the province.

Miss Ellen Dorich, now assistant librarian of the State library of Georgia, would like to become chief librarian, and a bill will be introduced at the coming session of the Legislature making women eligible for the position. If the bill passes she will get the position.

"Why Shouldn't Economic Women Buy Bargains if They Can Get Them?"

By Martha Denslow.

HERE are a good many slides to this bargain counter business.

People are always rising in social gatherings and in pulpits and in labor meetings and calling the bargain counters names. Sometimes they call the people who buy things at the bargain counters names. And they always say that the things of the bargain counters smell of blood.

The people who rise in social gatherings are usually people who have so much money that they can buy things anywhere and at almost any price.

Good Things Women Have Done This Week.

Mrs. Annie Donahue, of San Francisco, bequeathed \$200,000 to various charitable organizations.

Miss Helen Gould gave a Christmas tree and dinner to the poor children sheltered at Woody Crest.

Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont purchased a new lunch wagon to be used on the West Side by the Woman's Auxiliary to the Church Temperance Society.

Mrs. J. R. Lea gave a Christmas tree and entertainment to the poor children of Sunshine Mission.

Mollie Long, of Bridgeport, found her little sister in the snow when all the searchers had given her up for lost.

Rose Hawthorne Lathrop continued her work among the sick on the East Side.

Julia Levy gave up all her savings to save her father's business from attachment.

Mrs. T. S. Slade, of Cincinnati, left \$10,000 for distribution among charities.

Luoy Lipmann rescued her little brother from drowning.

Four women of Buffalo made up a purse to get an aged friend a home.

Miss Jane Pond began work to relieve distress in the poor quarters of Chicago.

Mrs. J. S. Baxter, of Boston, gave \$5,000 to assist an infant's shelter.

Mrs. S. T. McCormick distributed several tons of coal among poor families in West Side tenements.

Sadie McGovern saved her little brother, who fell through the ice while trying to skate.

and she has to keep up appearances. The woman who "keeps up appearances" has more on her mind than the woman who works in a sweatshop. She has to look prosperous and well groomed and happy—to keep up the self-respect of the deacons and the ministers and all the people who believe that religion is the most important thing in life, and who pay their ministers less than they pay a policeman. Take the minister's wife, for instance, what is she going to do when she wants a bit of finery to make her look decent at the donation party? Go to an expensive shop and see if the proprietor will trust her until the minister's salary day comes around? I'll tell you what she usually does. She borrows the neighbor's newspaper and she reads the advertisements, and she goes to the shop that says Bargains! Bargains!! Bargains!!!

How about the clerk's wife? How about the carpenter's wife? How about the butcher's wife? How about the young woman who has married the young man with a social position and "expectations"? How about the young doctor's wife? How about the little bride in the Harlem flat? How about all the women who want to look pretty and who haven't much money to spend in the process? How about the little typewriter, who has to look neat and modest to keep her position? How about the women in

the shops, the saleswomen? Where are they going to get their clothes? At Broadway, at a shop that does not advertise "bargains"? Who is going to pay for the things that are not "bargains"? It is the easiest thing in the world to grow pathetic and indignant and teary over the "white slaves" who make bargain counter things. It is easy and it is popular. Tears, sympathetic tears, are always popular. I have some to shed. Mine are for the people who wear the bargain counter things. The people who are just as generous, just as warmhearted, and just as kind-hearted as the ones who call the bargain counters names. The people who like pretty things and tasteful things and expensive things, and who have to wear "This lovely article at 90 cents." The people who would like to help the poor, but who are poorer in their pitiful economies and their miserable makeshifts than the poorest poor. The women who wouldn't hurt a fly. The women who would do anything in her world to help a struggling woman, and whose world is so

small and so mean that there is no room in it for any thing but mean economies.

Some day I'm going to paint a picture. I'm going to call it "The Slave of the Bargain Counter." It's going to be the picture of a neat, well-dressed woman. Pretty young women look better in a picture, so I think I'll have my slave young. But for all her youth and all her good looks she's going to have a "twenty-four-cent-a-day" expression. She's going to look as women look who be awake nights contriving a way to make Johnny look well enough to go to some one's party. She's going to look as women look who plot and plan and pinch and save to keep up appearances. She's going to look as women do who live in a little hall room and wash out their own handkerchiefs and dry them on the window pane, and who tell the other boarders that they like the upper floors because they are so much more beautiful. I'm going to make her look as women do whose whole lives are a series of petty economies and mean makeshifts, and I'm going to make her face a prophesy in all its glow of youth, of the face its going to be at the end of existence, full of false lace and imitation leather, and "make believe" of every humiliating sort. And then I'm going to sit down and have a good genuine cry over it, my slave of the bargain counter, the woman who wears bargain counter clothes.

"Bargain Counters Are Helpful to the Progress of Great Cities."

By Henry Siegel.

Proprietor of Big Department Stores.

THE bargain counter of a decade ago was quite a different institution from the bargain counter of to-day. Then the merchant placed a small counter or table somewhere in his store and threw upon it in a promiscuous heap all those portions of his stock which were either shop worn, out of style or for which there seemed to be no other means of selling. These goods well deserved the name often applied to them of "Job Lots," and the bargain counter naturally became a place where economical shoppers expected not only to get goods for a little price, but knew in advance that they would only receive such goods as were not as desirable as the articles carried regularly on the shelves behind the sales counter.

As long as this state of affairs lasted there was no fault found with anybody's bargain counter. Soon, however, the progressive merchant found out that goods on the bargain counter had a very quick selling, and the lowness of the price was so fascinating to the women that they neglected the other parts of the store to patronize it. Then the thought came to him: Why not improve the bargain counter and make it a means of regular selling, placing upon it not shop-worn goods, but new, fresh goods at a price low enough to please everybody.

The modern merchant tried this plan and found it an overwhelming success. So much so, that the less progressive merchant immediately became jealous and began to tell his customers, who seemed disposed to forsake his shop-worn counters for the new and better ones, that the new goods on the bargain counter were only possible by being unworthy qualities or by injury done to the laboring people who made the goods in reducing their wages in order to have the goods so cheap.

Thus came about the mistaken idea that prevails in the minds of many that the goods on the bargain counter (or, to speak in more modern terms, the goods sold as bargains, for the modern big store has bargains on every counter and in every department) are there because some in the history of their manufacturing have been compelled to sacrifice their rightful dues. No more mistaken idea about business has ever entered the minds of people than this, as nine times out of ten the modern bargain counters of to-day are not only a money saving to the economical buyers themselves (and the majority of this great army is composed of the working people), but are in turn a relief to the manufacturer, as well as a source of employment for thousands of wage earners who would otherwise be out of work.

Those who criticize bargain giving, and by bargain giving I mean offering reliable merchandise at lower prices than it can be sold in ordinary, are not the manufacturer who has been enabled to run his work shop all the year round instead of eight months by being able to dispose of, in one lump, to the bargain giving store, all his surplus stock; or the employees of the factory who have thus been enabled to hold steady positions, rather than being laid off during the dull months when their employer had more stock on hand than he could dispose of in the ordinary way.

The employees of a large underwear factory in New York did not recently complain because their old employer failed and the factory was shut down one of the progressive bargain stores purchased the stock of yard cottons and linens on hand and started up the factory again in order to furnish goods for their muslin underwear bargain sale, thus giving them employment which they would not have otherwise had.

There are perhaps in New York City alone to-day fifty manufacturing concerns whose present existence is due to the fact that in their hour of need, when they were overladen with goods that could not be sold in the ordinary way, when creditors were pressing them on every side and when it seemed almost a certainty that they would be forced to the wall, a big store stepped in with its ready cash and its insatiable bargain counter and relieved them of the pressure of circumstances by taking their overload of stock from off their financial shoulders.

It is not those men and women who are working twelve months a year instead of six or ten, or those who are working eight hours a day instead of four hours, on goods which go quickly through the bargain counter that complain, because in this manner larger quantities of goods are sold than would be possible in the ordinary methods of retailing.

Those who do criticize the modern bargain giving are largely those persons who are unacquainted with the retail business and have no real knowledge of how bargain giving comes about, or how helpful it is to the enterprise and progress of the great cities. Goods which are placed on the bargain counters of to-day must be better than goods sold on any of the counters of a store ten years ago, and this in itself tends to stimulate and create a demand for higher classes of work and more skillful workmen than heretofore.

The bargains of to-day come to the big stores rather through a combination of circumstances which has nothing to do with the interest of the laboring people, but which has been brought about by the purchasing of an unusually large quantity, by the clearance of some manufacturer's entire stock or by some other mercantile event, which in the majority of cases is rather a help to the artisan, the seamstress or the laborer than a detriment to their interests.